

## **Were you invited? Government review needs public input**

The Alberta government is quietly conducting a review of the public post-secondary education system. This review will articulate a new vision and policy outcomes for Alberta's universities, colleges, and technical institutes.

A review of the post-secondary education system is necessary. The government, however, has been moving the review process forward without providing meaningful opportunities for citizens to provide input. In fact, the review has been steadily underway behind closed doors all summer and this is the reason why you are reading this document. The government is now finalizing its vision for the post-secondary education system. This vision will be unveiled on or before a government hosted conference set for October 31, 2005.

Albertans must act now to participate in the post-secondary education review. Public Interest Alberta has produced this booklet to foster a wider and more informed discussion on post-secondary education that actually involves citizens. This is your opportunity to provide input into shaping our public post-secondary education system. Your voice must be heard.

## **Why should I care?**

Post-secondary education is the ticket to the future both for individuals and for Alberta. The benefits of post-secondary education are immense. Only through a well-funded and fully accessible post-secondary education system can we create vibrant and socially cohesive communities. A highly educated society is necessary to build a resilient economy in which prosperity is less dependant on non-renewable resources. Participation in such an economy will require an increasing proportion of individuals who have the advantage of a post-secondary education.

Post-secondary education will need to have a starring role in Alberta's second century. But, Alberta's system is suffering from some serious deficiencies.

Alberta government **funding** to post-secondary education institutions has been cut drastically over the last dozen years. Upfront costs are increasing sharply, which are threatening the **affordability** of the system for many prospective students. The post-secondary system does not have enough **spaces** to accommodate demand pressures, meaning that qualified students are being turned away from Alberta institutions. The overall **quality** of the post-secondary education experience is in decline.

We have an opportunity to establish an internationally acclaimed post-secondary education system but the government has not yet seized it. The government should be inviting the input of citizens – but it is not. Government should be designing a process that will lead to informed ideas from stakeholders – and it is not. It should be boldly challenging Albertans to set the post-secondary

education system on a path to be the best system in the world, a system that boasts the highest quality while ensuring access to the lowest income Albertan. Alas, no such challenge from the government has been voiced. Albertans deserve to have access to the best post-secondary education system in the world and we have the resources to do it. One question remains: does the government have the will and courage to do it?

Post-secondary education is a public good. We all pay taxes in the hope that the government will make wise investments to benefit our families and our communities. Our province is on the edge of a staggering opportunity yet there is little from the government to capture our imaginations regarding post-secondary education. How can we, the citizens of Alberta, act to make sure the opportunity to build the best post-secondary education system – thus securing a bright future – does not pass us by?

### **The time to act is now!**

It is not too late to participate and add your voice to the post-secondary education review. As citizens, it is our birthright to shape our public institutions together. This review will have a profound impact on Alberta's future. Decisions will be made that will impact the post-secondary education system relative to levels of public funding, affordability, accessibility, and quality – and these decisions will be made with or without your input.

### **How can I influence this process?**

Public Interest Alberta made this document to provide you with some background information and trends relative to our post-secondary education system.

We invite you to add your voice to the discussion happening in our province on post-secondary education. One vehicle is to complete the accompanying report card with this document and offer your insights, concerns, and directions on key post-secondary education issues: funding, affordability, accessibility, and quality. Alternatively, you can complete the report card online at [www.pialberta.org](http://www.pialberta.org). Participating in this process will also ensure that your MLA, in addition to the Minister of Advanced Education, will hear your input into the post-secondary education system review. Participating in our campaign on or before October 21, 2005, will ensure that the government receives your input in an effective timeframe.

This is just one component of our broad campaign that aims to ensure we, as citizens, will have a good discussion of post-secondary education – whether the government wants it or not.

## Why invest in post-secondary education?

### **What are the benefits?**

The benefits of post-secondary education are everywhere; our hospitals, schools, industries, trades, small and large businesses, and communities all benefit beyond measure from post-secondary education. It provides individuals the advanced knowledge and skills necessary for full participation in the new and diversified economy. Post-secondary graduates can also expect to earn higher incomes over their lifetime than individuals without post-secondary education.

While individuals benefit greatly, post-secondary education also has many important social benefits. University graduates make up about 15% of the working population, between the ages of 24 and 65, yet they pay 33% of all personal income taxes. By contrast they receive only 8% of all government transfers, such as employment insurance, to individuals.<sup>1</sup> For those without a high school diploma the situation is reversed. On average, they contribute much less in taxes and consume much more in services.

Statistically, post-secondary graduates are more likely to lead healthy and active lifestyles. Highly educated individuals are prone to higher levels of civic engagement and volunteerism. Their engagement produces a more socially cohesive and active society.

A high quality post-secondary education system with doors open wide is vital to remedy a skilled labour shortage that intensifies with each passing year. It is the only vehicle that can create greater numbers of health care professionals, social workers, engineers and planners, trades people, and teachers.

Post-secondary education diversifies the economy. This is vitally important for Alberta as a diversified economy will help to sustain our economic prosperity when we can no longer rely on our resource industries. It is hard to imagine a future without a central role for post-secondary education.

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<sup>1</sup> Junor, Sean and Alex Usher, *The Price of Knowledge 2004, Access and Student Financial Aid in Canada*, 2004, <http://www.millenniumscholarships.ca/en/research/poksum.asp>, accessed on June 29, 2005